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Ever-Widening Horizons: Hemingway's War Literature, 1923 to 1940

I. Introduction

Ernest Hemingway has permeated our cultural consciousness so deeply that his fiction has become difficult to consider without preconceived bias. His name might evoke thoughts of a bullfighting aficionado, big-game hunter, war hero, war correspondent, or even misogynist; but we cannot judge his writing on such terms. It is frequently the erroneous merging of his literature and his carefully cultivated public machismo that leads to accusations that he celebrates violence or demonstrates a "fetish of militarism" (Strychacz 108).¹ Hemingway is undoubtedly interested in war, but he finds it fascinating for the same reason that Homer, Shakespeare, and Tolstoy did: "Love, death, and war have always been the great raw materials of literature" (Cooperman 193). As Hemingway himself explained it when describing his early years in Europe, "I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things, and one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death" (DA 2).² On one level, death is simple, but Hemingway's characters struggled with disparate responses to death

¹ Chris Hedges believes that for many of us, "[c]ombat has an undeniable attraction. It is seductive and exciting, and it is ultimately addictive" (8). One point I hope to demonstrate is that Hemingway's work, despite appealing to war as a fount of experience and wisdom, suggests otherwise.

² In citations throughout this essay, I shall be using the following abbreviations for Hemingway's major works: IOT (*In Our Time*), AFTA (*A Farewell to Arms*), FWBT (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*), CSS (*The Complete Short Stories*), DA (*Death in the Afternoon*).

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throughout his career. It may be going too far to state that he viewed "life as one long war" (Young 193), but clearly war, and its attendant death, always intrigued him.

Heretofore, critics have generally focused on particular novels, particular themes, or Hemingway's oeuvre as a whole. The critical corpus lacks a specific examination of Hemingway's perspectives on the psychological burden of war. I propose to investigate Hemingway's changing attitudes toward war, starting with the early stories and sketches, mostly from *In Our Time*; moving on to *A Farewell to Arms*; and concluding with *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Readers may wonder why I have excluded *The Sun Also Rises* and *Across the River and Into the Trees*, the first of which is often considered his best novel, and the second of which centers on a World War II colonel. Though undoubtedly a masterpiece, *The Sun Also Rises* addresses World War I tangentially. Jake Barnes's mysterious injury, Brett Ashley's grief, and the general tone of nihilism strongly suggest the influence of the war, but none of the scenes actually take place in battle. The novel does not, for example, address matters of duty, nor does it ask when killing is societally sanctioned. It is a brilliant depiction of *nada*, but a similar feeling can be extracted from *In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms*. Ultimately, its depiction of war is too indirect to be very profitable to this study. *Across the River and Into the Trees* does give us an accessible subject, but the critical consensus is that it also happens to be "one of [Hemingway's] weakest books" (Young 117). The novel is almost a parody of the early style; it has been excluded simply because the author was not at the height of his powers. Thus, we will limit ourselves to two novels and a handful of stories, work written between 1923 and 1940.

In this investigation of the psychological burdens of war, I will start with two themes common to all of the war fiction: the pressure war puts on language and communication and the curious union of creation and destruction. I will then apply a microscope to the horrors of battle. These horrors take three essential forms: harm to oneself, or fear of such harm; harm to one's comrades, and the corresponding duty to prevent it; and the psychological toll of killing one's enemy. These entwined categories, which shall sometimes be referred to as fear, duty, and guilt, exert pressure on each other. For example, fear of harm to oneself can cause a stiffening of resolve, a corresponding sense of duty, and a willful ignorance of the morality of killing. On the other hand, it can cause desertion. Seeing one's comrades injured can engender timidity, just as it can cause a rage that enables an illogical attack on the enemy even at the risk of death. Killing one's enemy can cause a fear of harm to oneself based on a sense of divine retribution, but it can also lead to a form of bravery that is predicated on the same assumption: since I have killed, I now *deserve* death and seek it. These psychological burdens are complex, involving questions of patriotism, pride, duty, religion, and circumstance. Looking through this lens, we shall read Hemingway's work chronologically, tracing the general movement from concern for self, to concern for self and comrades, to a humanism that includes concern even for the enemy. This general movement, fraught with exceptions and caveats, is only the framework for our investigation. That Hemingway's development is far from linear should not be surprising, since, like Robert Jordan, he always distrusted writing that was "too clear and simple and too open and shut" (FWBT 239).³

³ Hemingway expanded on this idea in a letter to Ivan Kashkin in 1939:

The last part of this essay will focus on three considerations that complicate this sense of Hemingway's "evolution": the author's stylistic changes over time, differences in genre, and most importantly, situational differences. Hemingway's decreasingly modernist style allowed for fuller characterization and fewer lacunae. Although the author still hides much that is essential, the inscrutability of *In Our Time* finds richer expression by 1940. With regard to genre, the novelistic form encourages introspection, while short stories achieve their strength by leaving much unsaid: a short story that clearly explains itself cannot tackle a very complex issue, owing to the constraints of length. Finally, by situational differences, I mean the historical, political, and martial chasms that separate the Great War from the Spanish Civil War. These factors are inseparable from any analysis of the literature of the time. With these considerations in mind, we can hope to achieve an understanding of Hemingway's fiction that accords with Robert Jordan's own experience: "The things he had come to know in this war were not so simple" (FWBT 248). War was a topic that Hemingway considered a "persistent dimension of the human condition" (Nakjavani 246); now let us turn directly to that essential topic, and examine some common ingredients of his war literature.

II. Common Ground

Hemingway's lean style owes something to the modernist movement as well as something to his subject matter. War, which is often repugnant to our sensibilities, is particularly suited to a style of understatement that traffics in lacunae and implication.

For your information in stories about the war I try to show *all* the different sides of it, taking it slowly and honestly and examining it from many ways. So never think one story represents my viewpoint because it is much too complicated for that.

(*Selected Letters* 480)

James Dawes notes that the depiction of war pushes language to its expressive limit, and often beyond:

As war reveals, violence harms language; it imposes silence upon groups and, through trauma and injury, disables the capacity of the individual to speak effectively...violence annuls verbal intercourse.

(2)

Twentieth century warfare, with its lethal technology that resulted in unprecedented horror and suffering, made an especially forceful impact on our language. Before World War I, "[o]ne read Hardy and Kipling and Conrad and frequented worlds of traditional moral action delineated in traditional moral language" (Fussell 23). After the Great War, these authors seemed quaint; one needed Hemingway, Joyce, Stein, and Dos Passos to give voice to the nihilism that the war had engendered.

In "On the Quai at Smyrna," Hemingway presents two linguistic barriers. First, there is the unnamed character's inability, or unwillingness, to find the appropriate words:

You remember the harbor. There were plenty of nice things floating around in it. That was the only time in my life I got so I dreamed about things. You didn't mind the women who were having babies as you did those with the dead ones...

The Greeks were nice chaps too. When they evacuated they had all their baggage animals they couldn't take off with them so they just broke their forelegs and dumped them into the shallow water. All those mules with their forelegs broken pushed over into the shallow water. It was all a pleasant business. My word yes a most pleasant business.

(IOT 12)

The character cannot directly express the horror and revulsion he feels, so he resorts to irony: "nice things," "nice chaps," "a most pleasant business."⁴ Although he tells us that he "dreamed about things," we suspect that this is another euphemism, and that his

⁴ On this point I concur with Wendolyn Tetlow, who argues that the speaker uses "an offhand tone of confidentiality and pseudo-toughness that attempts to cover his pain and vulnerability" (50).

dreams were actually nightmares. Not only does the character not tell us his reaction to the atrocities he saw, he does not even tell us precisely *what* was floating around in the harbor. The subsequent sentence speaks of dead babies: could *they* have been thrown into the harbor? The character's spare sentences yield little information and force the reader to imagine the motives behind the story: did the Greeks evacuate because they were afraid of torture? Did they cripple their animals because bullets were too precious a commodity? Does the narrator avoid explicit mention of what is in the harbor to forestall the shuddering effect it will have on him? Since the enormity of the scene exceeds the character's ability to convey it, the extralinguistic device of the reader's imagination must be enlisted to give a sense of the carnage.

The second barrier is the structure of Hemingway's presentation. "On the Quai" is a subtle frame story, the frame consisting of a mere two words in the first sentence: "he said." Other than that, the narrator presents nothing more than the character's words. There is no setting, no explanation, and no rumination. It is unclear which side the narrator is on and what his connection to the events is. Without the phrase "he said," we would consider the sketch to be a vivid first-person account; the phrase, however, signals that Hemingway is metafictionally drawing attention to his obfuscation. This picture of war, then, is quite self-consciously confusing and ambivalent. Hemingway is suggesting that war can only be perceived in that way; he highlights the limitations of language to suggest that war and language reside on opposite ends of the spectrum of civilization.

Even if one *can* find the words to talk about war, a barrier implicitly exists between the speaker and an audience that has not had the experience of war. "Soldier's Home" treats this type of linguistic barrier:

At first Krebs...did not want to talk about the war at all. Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it.

(IOT 69)⁵

For the townspeople, war has become a fiction whose main purpose is to "thrill"; as such, it loses its gravity and its meaning. Krebs does not react against his lies for moral reasons,⁶ but because he is disgusted with himself for selling his war experience to provide entertainment. He has learned that the kernel of truth, if there is one, cannot be communicated to the outsider; language fails the soldier. Hemingway underscores this same point by omitting almost all background information. We do not know exactly why Krebs has such trouble assimilating back into society, but it must have something to do with his war experience, about which we are told only that frequently "he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else" (IOT 69-70). The ironic tone that permeates *In Our Time* suggests that the root of the trouble is the slaughter attendant upon these acts of ostensible heroism and bravery. Krebs, not wanting to reopen his wounds, would like to suppress these memories. Hence his preference for European girls: "There was not all this talking" (IOT 72).

The incompatibility of language and war also figures centrally in *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway fills in more of the details, relying less on the reader's imagination

⁵ Paul Smith points out that the lying may have been due less to the town's thirst for atrocity stories than to Krebs's experiential emptiness: "legitimate questions might be asked about what he *had* learned on the battlefields of 1918 and whether the lies he told were not so much exaggerations of actualities but substitutes for nothing" (73).

⁶ In fact, his traditional Methodist values, which would prohibit lying, have been shattered by the war. When his mother reassures him that "'God has some work for everyone to do,'" he replies, "'I'm not in His Kingdom'" (IOT 75). When asked to pray, he answers, "'I can't'" (IOT 76).

than he did in *In Our Time*, but his protagonist continues to express war obliquely. The scene of Frederic Henry's wounding confirms Elaine Scarry's thesis that "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (4). After being hit by a mortar shell, Frederic thinks: "My legs felt warm and wet and my shoes were wet and warm inside. I knew that I was hit and leaned over and put my hand on my knee. My knee wasn't there" (AFTA 55). True, the ferocious suddenness of the blast has exceeded the character's ability to realize the extent of his wounds; true, Frederic is in shock, and he does not yet feel the pain; but the ironic description of life-threatening hemorrhaging as "warm and wet" demonstrates the way in which indescribably destructive technology also causes pain that is indescribable. The chilling sentence "my knee wasn't there" suggests that wartime language functions most effectively in negatives. There is no way to put into words what Frederic *does* feel; one can only say what he does *not* feel: in this case, his knee. Later in the scene, two soldiers, carrying Frederic to the post, drop him. His only reaction is to say, "'You sons of bitches'" (AFTA 56). He makes no mention of his excruciating pain because mere words, such as "excruciating pain," do not do justice to the feeling. The reader is left to surmise what being dropped must have felt like; Hemingway again posits that the experience of war is unsayable.⁷

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway, tackling the problem more directly, does not so easily shy away from descriptions of battle or pain. The most notable

⁷ Diane Price Herndl, observing Frederic's repeated silences, draws a rather different conclusion. She views these silences as machismo acts that form "a commentary on the whole self-destructiveness of wartime masculinity. That is, masculinity itself becomes a self-inflicted wound" (42). Herndl's reading criticizes Frederic's "performance of gender" (45) without considering its underlying causes. Frederic might open up in those moments "when it would seem healthiest to voice some reaction" (45), if not for military necessity. Military success depends on discipline, which in turn depends on communication only when necessary. And talk leads to emotional pain as often as it leads to catharsis. (In addition to Krebs, we could look to Robert Jordan for examples of this: "He knew the details very well and he knew they would not make good talking now" [FWBT 21].) Frederic's "masculinity" is not performative; it is an understandable reaction that facilitates his existence in wartime.

example is Pilar's story, a thirty-page interlude on the Republican torture of the Fascist townspeople. Hemingway, somewhat arrogantly and somewhat metafictionally, claims that Pilar's story is an extremely rare case of language accurately representing war. Most war stories simply elicit the numb response "what barbarians":

How many times had he heard this? How many times had he watched people say it with difficulty? How many times had he seen their eyes fill and their throats harden with the difficulty of saying my father, or my brother, or my mother, or my sister?...and always you said, "What barbarians."

You only heard the statement of the loss. You did not see the father fall as Pilar made him see the fascists die in that story she had told by the stream...

Pilar had made him see it in that town.

If that woman could only write. He would try to write it and if he had luck and could remember it perhaps he could get it down as she told it. God, how she could tell a story.

(FWBT 134)

As Robert Jordan, the aspiring writer, extols Pilar's outstanding narrative ability, Hemingway effectively pats himself on the back. In most writing, "[y]ou only heard the statement of the loss. You did not see" it. Pilar's verbal ability, like her ability to see Robert Jordan's future, is almost supernatural. Thus the barrier between language and war is preserved in all but the extraordinary cases.⁸

Although war puts enormous pressure on language, language can also affect the way war is waged. The act of killing can test a soldier's nerves and his morality; the proper manipulation of language can enable killing:

A regular soldier can serve years in the Army and hardly ever hear the word "kill" outside bayonet practice...Army manuals and drill sergeants speak of "suppressing enemy fire," "engaging targets," and "attritting" the enemy.

⁸ An indication of the barrier between war and language can also be found in the characters' constant desire to suppress stimuli, thus annulling the need for language. This is seen in the constant drinking, the reluctance to ask questions, and the choking of thoughts. "Turn off the thinking now," Jordan orders himself. "You're a bridge-blower now. Not a thinker" (FWBT 17). This theme also runs throughout *In Our Time* ("Everybody was drunk" [13]) and *A Farewell to Arms* ("What are you thinking, darling?" "About whiskey" [310]).

(Baum 47)⁹

A soldier's mind sometimes plays tricks on itself to deny the wickedness of his acts. In interchapter IV, for example, a soldier describes "pott[ing]" the enemies, one after another. "It was simply priceless...It was absolutely topping" (IOT 37). The irony is clear, but it is also worth noting that the shooter is attempting to soften the enormity of his actions by using lighthearted slang words. "Potting" the enemy tries to transform war into a sport, in which killing is societally accepted.

Frederic Henry uses the language of military discipline to "justify" the killing of a sergeant for the slightest of reasons. "'Halt,'" he commands. "'I order you to halt'" (AFTA 204). When the soldiers do not stop, he shoots and "drop[s] one" (AFTA 204). We should note the militarism of "halt," the use of "dropped" for "killed," and the substitution of "one" for "a man." In addition to enabling Frederic to fire his weapon, these linguistic tricks serve to minimize his guilt, at least in the short term. Robert Jordan performs a similar verbal machination, but he catches himself in the act:

There was the constant attempt to approximate the conditions of successful assassination that accompanied the demolition. Did big words make it more defensible? Did they make killing any more palatable?

(FWBT 165)¹⁰

As we shall see, Robert's heightened self-awareness is what makes his reflections on warfare so compelling; it also makes the performance of his duties especially painful.

Before concluding this section, I would like to point to one other major theme running through Hemingway's war literature: the affinity of creation and destruction.

⁹ Another example of the military's euphemistic nomenclature would be the descriptor "anti-personnel," i.e., designed to kill humans.

¹⁰ Mark Van Gunten's reading of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* unearths another example of this linguistic contortion in a minor Russian character: "Karkov's preference of the terms 'execute and destroy' over 'assassinate' elevates killing by the Party over 'acts of terrorism by individuals'" (145).

Throughout these works, war and death are frequently collocated with love, sex, and birth. For one thing, prostitution flourishes in wartime.¹¹ We have already seen the eerie presence of babies in a war zone in "On the Quai at Smyrna"; women in labor appear in "Indian Camp" and interchapter II. "A Very Short Story," which is almost an outline of *A Farewell to Arms*, concisely depicts an injured soldier's need for love in the environs of death. Luz, "cool and fresh in the hot night" (IOT 65), provides a soothing antidote to war and its searing heat. The protagonist's body, invaded by the war, must also be invaded by the doctors: "When they operated on him she prepared him for the operating table; and they had a joke about friend or enema" (IOT 65). His sexual conquest of Luz, then, is psychologically connected to battle; his invasion of her body parallels what the war has done to him. Stanley Cooperman finds this equation to be true throughout the author's career:

Death, in the novels of Hemingway, must be passive and women (in their complete passivity) must be objects; when either death or the woman forces a protagonist to exchange roles the result is emasculation; and this in turn forces him to seek out one or the other, death or the woman, as a means of repairing his sadly injured virility.

(188)

Although this theory has merit, it overstates the case, missing the fact that Luz and Catherine Barkley have a certain degree of aggression and control within their relationships.¹² As nurses, they have physical and psychological authority over their patients; as lovers, they must be in physically dominant positions because of their soldiers' debilitating injuries.

¹¹ For examples, see: *In Our Time*, interchapter VII and "Soldier's Home"; *A Farewell to Arms*, chapters 2 and 6; *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, chapter 24.

¹² To his credit, Cooperman, writing in 1967, did not have access to *The Garden of Eden*, a posthumously published novel which revealed that Hemingway's thinking about sexual identity and roles was more complex than had been previously thought. After its publication in 1986, "all critical reticence about sexual matters began to evaporate" (Wagner-Martin 142).

The oppressive experience of war clearly influences Frederic Henry and Robert Jordan by imbuing their relationships with an air of desperate necessity. Before his injury, Frederic senses no danger: "I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous to me myself than war in the movies" (AFTA 37). It is telling that Frederic initially treats Catherine as a mere vehicle for lovemaking, substituting nightly visits to her for his habitual trips to the prostitutes. After all, it was just "a game, like bridge":

"You did say you loved me, didn't you?"
 "Yes," I lied. "I love you."...
 I thought she was probably a little crazy.

(AFTA 30)

After being injured, Frederic does not immediately see Catherine; when he does, however, he is flush with the emotion of his nearly fatal experience. The change in tone is dramatic: familiarity with death has engendered a strong drive toward life, love, and sex:

"Hello, darling," she said. She looked fresh and young and very beautiful. I thought I had never seen any one so beautiful.
 "Hello," I said. When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me.

(AFTA 91)

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Robert Jordan is familiar with death at the outset. He is a veteran guerilla warrior who has killed many fascists (as well as his former comrade Kashkin). Although Robert's attraction to Maria, unlike Frederic's to Catherine, is not as clearly a direct response to the threat of death, the relationship is still enabled by the perils of battle:

...[I]t was hard for him to look at her because it made his voice change so. He was violating the second rule of the two rules for getting on well with people that speak Spanish; give the men tobacco and leave the women alone; and he realized,

very suddenly, that he did not care. There were so many things that he had not to care about, why should he care about that?

(FWBT 24)

As the exigencies of war have trained Robert to disregard what is not useful to him, so he disregards his former rules for "getting on well." He knows that "getting on well" is no longer as essential since he must now lead, not befriend, his guerilla troops. The more potent implication is that he knows how difficult his mission will be, and suspects that he will soon die. With only four days left to live, why should he stifle his feelings for Maria?

The mysterious conjunction of love and war has been the topic of considerable critical discussion. James Dawes proposes that "[w]ar ravishes identity, coercively dissolving the differences between individuals" (139), an explanation which devalues the lovers and places more emphasis on their milieu. Dawes's theory, focusing on the visceral reaction humans generate in the face of death, is quite applicable to Frederic Henry and Harold Krebs. This consequences-be-damned hedonism is less applicable to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, as Maria's identity is vital to Robert's passion. His love arises out of a realization "that only through mutually fulfilling sex is there any true and lasting immortality to be had" (Gajdusek 271). The creative urge thus balances the destructive one, a point made succinctly by the gypsy: "You were supposed to kill [a man], not make one!" (FWBT 79). Robert Jordan has taken many lives; perhaps part of his love for Maria is his desire to restore life to the world, to even the cosmic scales.

We have scratched the surface of war's complex relationships with language and love. War's horror is abundantly clear in all of the works we are considering, but let us take a closer look. How does the presentation of war evolve with time? Does the

Hemingway of 1940 possess knowledge that was lacking in *In Our Time*? Does the author move toward pacifism? Finally, if there is an apparent shift in the depiction of war, what are the extrinsic influences?

III. *In Our Time* and the Early Stories

Let us return to the three concentric circles with which we started: harm to oneself, or fear of such harm; harm to one's comrades, and the corresponding duty to prevent it; and the psychological toll of killing one's enemy. Hemingway's war fiction undoubtedly involves all of these concerns, to some degree or another. Sometimes their recognition is tacitly embedded, and sometimes it is stated openly. The early stories, however, are predominantly concerned with the innermost circle, i.e., concern for the self. According to Milton Cohen, in the 1920s,

Hemingway gives us protagonists very much needing private courage to grapple with daunting problems: courage to conduct themselves honorably on the battlefield when they are terrified of dying; courage to get them through the night in peacetime when their lives have been shattered.

(2001: 292)

Clearly, Cohen views the inner circle as predominant. Interchapter I begins *In Our Time* with the words, "Everybody was drunk. The whole battery was drunk going along the road in the dark"¹³ (IOT 13). Hemingway elaborates further on the drunken company; meanwhile, the adjutant perpetually worries about a fire in the kitchen, which is meaningless because the troops are fifty kilometers from the front. The overwhelming emotion of the sketch is fear: the drunkenness is an attempt to mask it, and the adjutant's behavior demonstrates that psychological transference is at work. The road is

¹³ Current editions of *In Our Time* begin with "On the Quai at Smyrna," but this vignette was not added until 1930, when it was called "Introduction by the Author." The 1923 and 1925 editions began with interchapter I.

metaphorically as well as literally dark, for the battery is headed to Champagne, the setting for a “tactical victory” that cost the French 145,000 men (Tetlow 20). “It was funny going along that road,” the narrator concludes (IOT 13). Knowing Hemingway’s penchant for adjectival flatness and implication, we can surmise that the “funniness” refers to the battery’s gripping fear.

Interchapter VII forms the book’s most direct expression of fear. A soldier, bombarded with mortar fire, lies flat and prays:

Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you’ll only keep me from getting killed I’ll do anything you say. I believe in you and I’ll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters.

(IOT 67)

In the heat of battle, the soldier does not think about his comrades or his enemies; as one would expect, he is entirely concerned with his own life. Since the soldier survives the shelling, goes to a prostitute the next night, and never tells anyone about Jesus, the sketch turns out to be a humorous commentary on the empty promises that frightened people make to God. But it also provides a more trenchant look at war’s effect on religion. The first indication that the soldier is not religious is the fact that he is praying for his own life. A more devout individual would likely pray for God’s will to be done, and if death seemed inevitable, would at least hope to die honorably and in a good cause (although perhaps the World War I setting makes this impossible). The soldier uses lowercase letters for both “jesus” and “christ,” which can be attributed to his rushed mutterings, but which also indicates a lack of respect.¹⁴ The phrase “I believe in you” appears to be the soldier’s attempt to convince himself; why would a believer feel the need to confirm such a thing? Although there is no causal connection, the suggestion seems to be, as in

¹⁴ The lowercase words are further underscored by the narrator’s later use of the capitalized “Jesus.”

“Soldier’s Home,” that trench warfare chips away at one’s faith.¹⁵ If so, the emphasis on the self is even more pronounced. Without the belief in an afterlife, without the need to strive for heaven, one’s moral concerns become somewhat more circumscribed and this earthly life assumes greater importance.

“Big Two-Hearted River,” “In Another Country,” and “Now I Lay Me” focus on the postwar healing of the self. In place of the immediate terror of interchapter VII, the soldiers of these stories have to struggle with a lifetime burden of injured minds and bodies. That the first of these stories is about war is never stated in the text, but clues abound. The town of Seney, which has been decimated by fire—“[e]ven the surface had been burned off the ground” (IOT 133)—reminds Nick of the scarred landscape of war-ravaged Europe. Mechanized war is suggested by the “dangerous,” “mechanical shriek” of the fishing pole, which overwhelms him: “Nick’s hand was shaky” (IOT 150). His careful actions suggest a man who is struggling mightily to control his life and his emotions.¹⁶ Just as “Hills Like White Elephants,” via its title, suggests that its plot is a simile, “Big Two-Hearted River,” in talking about hills that can be dimly seen, hints that it is about something more: “If he looked too steadily they were gone. But if he only half-looked they were there...” (135). If we look “too steadily” at the story, it is an excruciatingly detailed account of a fishing trip; if we “only half-look,” we can glimpse the specter of war.

¹⁵ Although a full investigation of why World War I led so many to atheism is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that fate, which is typically thought to be the province of God, is also closely related to war. Clausewitz tells us that war is a gamble: “[n]o other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance” (14). To a soldier waiting in a trench to be bombed, surviving the shelling while his comrades died all around him, the Great War must have seemed especially “bound up with chance.” Valor was irrelevant, and there was no apparent rhyme or reason to the deaths. In such a setting, how could one help but doubt that God was looking on providentially?

¹⁶ In this line of argument, I am following the lead of Philip Young, who put forward an interpretation that has stood for almost forty years: “A terrible panic is just barely under control, and the style—this is the ‘Hemingway style’ at its most extreme—is the perfect expression of the content of the story” (46).

“In Another Country,” which takes place in a hospital, is a more straightforward account of war’s toll. The shell-shocked narrator has a serious leg injury and each day undergoes physical therapy with other soldiers. Although he has received medals for courage, he admits that they were given only because he is an American; he knows himself incapable of true valor:

...I knew that I would never have done such things, and I was very much afraid to die, and often lay in bed at night by myself, afraid to die and wondering how I would be when I went back to the front again.

(CSS 208)

The narrator’s admission clearly prioritizes self-preservation over courage. It is worthwhile to note that the patients’ anger in this story is often directed at the “machines” that are supposed to heal them. These machines echo the war-machines that made World War I so horrendous, and Hemingway closes with the uselessness of the machines: the failure to heal, mentally and physically, from the war.

“Now I Lay Me” features a terrified narrator who cannot sleep at night. His torment is not based on the men he has killed, or the duty in which he has failed, but on his own mortality:

I myself did not want to sleep because I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way for a long time, ever since I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back.

(CSS 276)

The war has ruined the protagonist’s ability to sleep, which, since sleeping is a restorative action, necessary for the healing of mind and body, implies that he cannot recover from the war. The physical repercussions of being “blown up,” which sound quite serious, do not even figure in the story: the burden is primarily mental. The narrator concentrates on trying to rewrite his memories, starting from childhood and continuing until he reaches

the war. When he cannot remember his prayers, he thinks of “all the animals in the world by name and then the birds and then fishes and then countries and cities and then kinds of food and the names of all the streets I could remember in Chicago...” (CSS 278). The narrator is desperate to avoid thinking of battle, cramming his head with useless lists rather than facing his experiences. His comrade who lies awake assures him that marrying a “nice Italian girl” would bring him back to health (CSS 281). As in the previous story, the narrator’s ironic conclusion suggests unending despair: “he was very certain about marriage and knew it would fix up everything” (CSS 282).

Although the early stories focus primarily on damage to the self, both in battle and after battle, we would be remiss without acknowledging that they occasionally hint at a wider arc of concerns. Interchapters III and IV depict soldiers killing helpless Germans. The soldiers express no remorse or compunction, yet their striking tones suggest that an unspoken guilt may be lurking. The narrator of interchapter III “pot[s]” his enemies without apparent expression; he speaks in short, unpunctuated sentences that remind one of Nick Adams struggling to control himself in “Big Two-Hearted River.” The word “pot,” which implies a lack of regard for the enemy and equates shooting Germans to hunting animals, seems ironic. And the last lines of the sketch undercut the soldier’s apparent callousness: “We shot them. They all came just like that” (IOT 29). The image of “all” of the German soldiers dying this way tells of uncounted deaths, and the weight they still exert on the narrator. His affectless speech thus provides room for an acknowledgement of the moral guilt of killing. “This radically simple style,” claims Milton Cohen, “expresses a psychological state altogether different from the ebullience of Chapter IV” (2000: 25). The ebullience of interchapter IV, however, can be read as

heavily ironic. The “frightfully hot day,” the “absolutely perfect barricade,” and the “absolutely topping” process of “pott[ing]” the enemy (IOT 37)—these phrases strike a note of discord when we consider Hemingway’s avoidance of adjectives and his presentation of war throughout *In Our Time* as anything but heroic and exciting.¹⁷ We should note, too, that the narrators of interchapters III and IV do not take individual responsibility for their killings, but employ the pronoun “we.” This stratagem accords with the psychological observations of Ben Shalit, who finds that the dynamics of the group enable a level of aggression that far exceeds that of the individual (75-79). These soldiers use the protection of the group to shield themselves from guilt, an oblique acknowledgement of the psychological burden of killing. So *In Our Time*, if primarily concerned with the damage to the self, makes tacit gestures to a horror that will find its fullest expression in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

IV. *A Farewell to Arms*

Structurally, *A Farewell to Arms* might appear to be the story of a soldier’s complete submission to fear, since Frederic Henry deserts his army and flees to Switzerland with his lover. But his desertion is not a matter of shirking danger for the

¹⁷ Those seeking precedent for a literal interpretation of interchapter IV might point to *Death in the Afternoon*, in which Hemingway speaks of the matador’s enthusiasm for killing:

A great killer must love to kill...Killing cleanly and in a way which gives you aesthetic pleasure and pride has always been one of the greatest enjoyments of a part of the human race...when a man is still in rebellion against death he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the Godlike attributes; that of giving it.

(DA 232-33)

But to equate the arena of war with the bullring is to confuse Hemingway’s humanistic morality with the ritualized death of the animal. Hemingway never celebrates war, which is neither orderly nor ritualized. As he advised in the foreword to *Treasury for the Free World*, “never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime. Ask the infantry and ask the dead” (xv).

cause as much as it is an avoidance of needless death; in battle, Frederic proves himself courageous and selfless. He and his sergeants are hit while "eating cheese" (AFTA 63); as banal as this sounds, Frederic has taken a personal risk, against the advice of the major, to procure the food for his men. After he is hit, Frederic says nothing about his own condition, only asking about the condition of his troops; when offered medical treatment, he demurs, insisting that "[t]here are much worse wounded than me" (AFTA 58). His emphasis on his troops over himself and his enemies constitutes the traditional definition of heroism. Frederic, then, does not desert the Italian Army out of fear: he pragmatically deserts because the battle police, erroneously believing him to be a German spy, are about to summarily execute him. This scene constitutes the apogee of two recurring themes in the novel: Frederic's feeling as an outsider in the Italian army, and the army's threat to its own soldiers.

If the concepts of statehood and war are inextricably linked (Gallie 32), then Frederic's nationality is an understandable barrier to his devotion. His presence as a foreigner in the Italian Army is the first topic of conversation with Catherine and with the head nurse. Frederic stands out among the Italian medics, with the officers essentially putting on a nightly show for his benefit; the captain singles him out by speaking "pidgin Italian" (AFTA 8) to him. The barber believes him to be Austrian, foreshadowing the confusion of the battle police, who will think he is German; one of the doctors treating him thinks that he is "a Frenchman" (AFTA 60). And Catherine assures him that he is not guilty of desertion, since "[i]t's only the Italian army" (AFTA 251). Thus the perception of Frederic's nationality is as confused as the aims and tactics of the allied cause. If his nationality is one mitigating factor in his desertion, the army's threat to its

own soldiers is another. This trope recurs in two ways: the battle police's executions, and the doctors' healing torture. The Italian sergeants tell Frederic of a unit that refused to attack; apparently, their own comrades "lined them up afterward and took every tenth man. Carabinieri shot them" (AFTA 49). This chilling image foreshadows Frederic's own experience with the battle police. The allied doctors, in their mission, are also threatening: "The point of military medicine is to heal men to the extent that they can go and face death again" (Herndl 49). While treating Frederic, the doctors tell the adjutant that the injuries were "[i]ncurred in the line of duty. That's what keeps you from being court-martialled for self-inflicted wounds" (AFTA 59). Even so, the adjutant and the doctors do not entirely believe him—"What were you trying to do? Commit suicide?" (AFTA 59)—until they have brutally cut into his flesh and exhumed evidence of the enemy mortal shell. The suspicions of the doctors are well founded, however: trench warfare is so horrific that Frederic has already met an American soldier who has exacerbated his hernia and hit himself in the head to avoid going to the front. But beyond the medical mission—to return the soldier to the deadly front—and the doctors' suspicions, the essential crudeness of wartime medicine is a form of torture in itself: "The dead were off to one side. The doctors were working with their sleeves up to their shoulders and were red as butchers" (AFTA 56-57). As Dr. Valentini—the *good* doctor—admits, "How they love to hurt you, these doctors" (AFTA 99). Their apparent sadism may be largely a function of military necessity, but it nonetheless contributes to the recurring theme of friendly fire.

Frederic's selfless and courageous conduct during the initial portion of the retreat corresponds to his actions in the trench, demonstrating that he is, above all, focused on

protecting his troops. That commitment starts to waver, however, once he needlessly shoots the hitchhiking sergeant. The violence of that scene is sudden and unnecessary: Frederic never indicates that he will shoot (nor has his pistol even been mentioned); his authority to do so is questionable (“You can’t order us. You’re not our officer” [AFTA 204]); his reasoning is suspect since he winds up deserting the car anyway; and the execution he allows Bonello to conclude—“Let me go finish him” (AFTA 204)—is brutal. The sloppiness of the murder (“The pistol did not fire. ‘You have to cock it,’ I said” [AFTA 204]), given Hemingway’s obsession with proper form and procedure, is a good indication of its negative moral valence. Hemingway’s view of warfare is rarely constructed to allow for cause-and-effect relationships, but in this case the narrative makes it plain: Frederic has harmed a comrade, essentially mistaking the sergeant for a threat, so his soldier Aymo, shot by Italians, subsequently suffers the same fate.¹⁸ A similar ironic confusion almost causes Frederic’s own death;¹⁹ his plunge into the river is the baptism that cleanses him of all military obligations. Frederic’s duty to his comrades and to the allied cause finds its eventual form in his commitment to Catherine, who was also once a comrade. Her death may mean, as Robert Penn Warren suggests, that a personal relationship cannot be a substitute for a universal meaning because the personal

¹⁸ Linda Wagner-Martin points out that Bonello’s desertion is also closely tied to the killing because he is afraid to die both at the hands of the enemy and as a result of Frederic’s summary justice. Again, the line between friend and enemy is a shaky one; since Bonello is actually guilty of the killing, he may also fear a (non-summary) judicial punishment. Frederic’s rash act thus indirectly dissolves his group, leaving only Piani. Tellingly, the battle police are executing officers who have lost their troops, so Frederic’s bullet has spiraled out of control, killing Aymo, losing Bonello, and threatening his own life.

¹⁹ Although Frederic’s killing is shown to be reprehensible, a point which we shall soon explore, Margot Norris goes too far in saying that “Frederic’s jurisdiction over the two Italian sergeants is no clearer than the battle police’s right to discipline him” (74). Both situations are based on a certain degree of confusion and excessive force, but the sergeants’ active disobedience stands somewhat apart from Frederic’s passive obedience (at least, up to the moment of execution). His active disobedience—the shooting of the soldier—is punished in the narrative, but could not be known to the battle police.

relationship is always doomed to failure (xxxi). It may also be a dose of *nada*, indicating that there is no universal meaning: causes are fragile, and die as often as people do.

Since Frederic is a support officer, he is not directly involved in attacking the enemy. Thus, to fathom his thoughts on aggression and killing, we must closely read his reaction to the shooting of the sergeant. That he knows he is legally wrong is revealed when he tells Bonello to throw away the coat, which is evidence of the killing. Morally, the magnitude of his sin corresponds to the disturbing presence of the dead body. It refuses to go away, cropping up in non-sequiturs: "The sun was almost out from behind the clouds and the body of the sergeant lay beside the hedge" (AFTA 205); "I looked back up the road. The sergeant lay in his dirty long-sleeved underwear" (AFTA 206). Frederic's eerie silence after the shooting contrasts with Bonello's bloodlust ("You see me shoot him, Tenente?" [AFTA 204]; "I never killed anybody in this war, and all my life I've wanted to kill a sergeant" [AFTA 207]).²⁰ When Bonello makes a joke about the killing, "[t]hey all laughed" (AFTA 208)—all but Frederic. Finally, the source of Frederic's alcoholic depression in Switzerland is unclear; since he has successfully escaped the war with Catherine, it seems that his mood must spring from memories of the war, and his unprovoked shooting must be foremost among them. *A Farewell to Arms*

²⁰ Bonello's satisfaction with his killing, if we are not to interpret it as the ironic bluster of interchapter IV, may be a commentary on the ambulance-drivers' role and the nature of World War I. Soldiers who have seen many of their comrades die, especially after being bottled up for so long—shelled mercilessly and crouched defensively—often respond with a violent outburst:

The recent loss of friends and beloved leaders in combat can also enable violence on the battlefield. The deaths of friends and comrades *can* stun, paralyze, and emotionally defeat soldiers. But in many circumstances soldiers react with anger (which is one of the well-known response stages to death and dying), and then the loss of comrades can enable killing.

(Grossman 179)

Interestingly, Frederic Henry's response indicates the possibility of both reactions: anger, in the case of the shooting of the sergeant, and paralysis, in the case of his drunken stupor in Switzerland.

thus concentrates primarily on the web of loyalties to the self and to one's comrades; like *In Our Time*, it only makes tacit gestures to the horror of killing.

V. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

The diverse spectrum of characters in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* ensures variegated responses to the exigencies of war. Pablo, the fallen leader, provides the best example of selfish submission to fear: "I am afraid to die," he admits to Pilar (FWBT 90). He had once been courageous, but now "[t]he plug has been drawn and the wine has all run out of the skin" (FWBT 89). This metaphor draws a resonant connection between bravery and drunkenness, a theme Hemingway has employed since *In Our Time*. But although courage often depends on a bit of alcohol, alcohol alone cannot grant mettle. Pablo is a useless drunk for much of the novel, and because of his fear, he is nearly killed by his own group. The members of the guerilla band do not incriminate Pablo's fear of death, per se, but they are angered by the way it affects his sense of duty. After Robert Jordan states his obligations to the war effort and to his superior officers, Pablo responds:

"To me, now, the most important is that we be not disturbed here," Pablo said. "To me, now, my duty is to those who are with me and to myself."

"Thyself. Yes," Anselmo said. "Thyself now since a long time."

(FWBT 15)

Pablo's fear is equated with a failing in his sense of duty. The goal of not being disturbed is inconsistent with the Republican war effort; protecting the party by hiding in the mountains is a shortsighted objective that places the "fox-hole before the interests of humanity" (FWBT 11). Duty to "those who are with me" sounds noble, but Pablo reveals the narrowness of the term "with me" when he brutally executes the five men with whom he has been fighting in order to provide more horses for the escape. As

Anselmo points out, Pablo is only concerned with himself. His selfishness bleeds into the other two categories of war horror: it poisons his loyalty to allies and it gives him no scruples about killing enemies. Exclusive emphasis on the first horror, harm to oneself, *does* protect a soldier to some extent from the other psychological burdens—but in the process, it makes him a monster. In the words of Karl von Clausewitz, it is “the lower region of animal nature which shrinks from danger and knows not shame” (37).

Although Pablo’s selfishness is a rational way of responding to war, it is at odds with the feelings of most experienced soldiers.²¹ Robert, Anselmo, Agustín, and the other guerilla fighters subjugate their fear for the sake of the mission. Robert’s selflessness is established from the beginning: “he was not usually worried because he did not give any importance to what happened to himself” (FWBT 4). Even Maria, who is not a combatant, recognizes the virtue of placing the concerns of the group ahead of individual fear. When Robert tries to move her to the head of the caravan, which will be less dangerous during the retreat, she stoutly replies, “Nay...I go in the order that I am to go” (FWBT 458). Her succinct refusal doubles as an acceptance of the unpredictable power of Thanatos, who has already determined the order that we are all to go. Robert, like Maria, faces death calmly: “Now, finally and at last, there was no problem” (FWBT 466).²² One problem does remain, however. Robert must deal with the excruciating pain

²¹ The Israeli military psychologist Ben Shalit, in a study of Israeli soldiers and Swedish UN troops, found that “letting others down” was more important than “bodily harm and death” (11). He also discovered the even more surprising fact that “exposure to battle and physical danger did not increase fear of death and injury, but decreased it” (12).

²² Curiously, Jordan’s sense of relief echoes Hemingway’s own philosophy as expressed in a 1939 letter:

As long as there is a war you always think perhaps you will be killed so you have nothing to worry about. But now I am not killed so I have to work. And as you have no doubt discovered living is much more difficult and complicated than dying and it is just as hard as ever to write.

(*Selected Letters* 481)

of his broken leg, and the corresponding suicidal urge, in order to perform his final act of selfless duty. The mental struggle is exacerbated by the physical trauma: physical pain “annihilates not only the objects of complex thought and emotion but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception” (Scarry, qtd. in Dawes 95). Robert’s unusual fortitude, however, allows him to continue to think through his suffering. “You can do nothing for yourself,” he reasons, “but perhaps you can do something for another” (FWBT 466). In fact, he *can* do something for himself—put himself out of his misery—but he chooses duty, which advances the anti-fascist cause by taking one more life, that of the sympathetic Lieutenant Berrendo.

The horror of harm to one’s comrades takes several forms. At its most basic level, it is the trauma of seeing a fellow soldier injured or killed—often grotesquely, given the overwhelming power of twentieth-century weapons.²³ This trauma profoundly affects soldiers because of the brotherhood forged in their common struggles: “in military writings on unit cohesion, one consistently finds the assertion that the bonds combat soldiers form with one another are stronger than the bonds most men have with their wives” (Gabriel 134). Primitivo exemplifies this trauma, struck with sorrow when he realizes that El Sordo and his men are dying on the hill. Although the immediacy of the battle—the sickening experience of the carnage—is somewhat lost because of distance, Primitivo still struggles to control himself: “Robert Jordan saw the stubble twitching at

²³ Catherine Barkley, reminiscing about her dead fiancé, eloquently expresses the outsized violence of modern weaponry:

“I remember having a silly idea he might come to the hospital where I was. With a sabre cut, I suppose, and a bandage around his head. Or shot through the shoulder. Something picturesque.”

“This is the picturesque front,” I said.

“Yes,” she said. “People can’t realize what France is like. If they did, it couldn’t all go on. He didn’t have a sabre cut. They blew him all to bits.”

(AFTA 20)

the corners of his mouth and over the cord of his throat" (FWBT 296). Primitivo wishes to convert his sadness to rage by storming the hill, but Robert will not let him. This powerlessness makes the experience of El Sordo's slaughter even harder to bear, and Primitivo, now denied the option of physical revenge, commences a useless verbal revenge:

"Oh, obscenity them," Primitivo said with an absolute devoutness of blasphemy, tears in his eyes and his cheeks twitching. "Oh, God and the Virgin, obscenity them in the milk of their filth."

(FWBT 297)

Agustín has a similar reaction to Robert's imminent death. Although he has not known Robert Jordan as long as Primitivo knew El Sordo, the two men still develop a deep bond based on a devotion to duty, a certain intelligence, and an affection for Maria. Agustín is something of a brother to Maria, even gauging the sincerity of Robert's intentions after the lovers have slept together. It is also significant that Agustín is the one Robert Jordan charges to "look well after the cropped head" (FWBT 465). Seeing his comrade's crushed leg, Agustín offers to shoot him to avoid the pain and possible torture. "It is nothing," claims Agustín (FWBT 465). After Robert refuses his offer, however, Agustín realizes that he is powerless to help, and like Primitivo in the same situation, he responds with sorrow and anger: "*Me cago en la leche que me han dado!*"²⁴ Agustín said. He was crying so he could not see Robert Jordan clearly" (FWBT 465). The trauma of losing one's comrades is worst when no retribution is possible; in modern wars of mortar shells and aerial bombardment, this is often the case.

After losing a fellow soldier, the rage arising from a sense of injustice is easily misdirected. Even Robert Jordan, normally a model of military efficiency and discipline,

²⁴ Literally, "I defecate in the milk that they have given me!" The malediction is remarkably similar to the previous one uttered by Primitivo.

cannot control himself after Anselmo's death. "Obscenity all of you," he tells Pilar.

"Thou and Pablo both" (FWBT 447). Jordan has undergone the same psychological process as Primitivo and Agustín:

The anger and the emptiness and the hate that had come with the let-down after the bridge, when he had looked up from where he had lain and crouching, seen Anselmo dead, were still all through him. In him, too, was despair from the sorrow that soldiers turn to hatred in order that they may continue to be soldiers. Now it was over he was lonely, detached and unelated and he hated every one he saw.

(FWBT 447)

Some soldiers respond to the suffering of a comrade with fear, suddenly understanding that they may be next. Some, like Agustín, become angry at the death of a friend, thriving on the rage and projecting it onto the enemy, thus momentarily suspending the moral question of killing. Jordan, who is more rational—"we do it coldly" (FWBT 286)—tries to regain control of his emotions. He is able to dampen his rage, partly because he begins to accept Anselmo's death as part of a natural process (like "the snow" [FWBT 447]) and partly because he knows that he can better serve his group as a levelheaded leader. The trouble with leading is that Jordan must attempt to treat those for whom he cares as mere "instruments for war" (Clausewitz 32).²⁵ To succeed in his mission, he must suppress the urge to make a martyr of Anselmo; he must treat himself as an instrument for war, too. In Robert's martial code, fear and rage are to be suppressed as much as possible in order to best serve one's comrades. Proper duty, then, is intricately linked to the experience, and the fear, of harm to one's comrades.

Although we have alluded to the possible tacit recognition of the cost of killing in the early works, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* considers the topic deeply and directly. The

²⁵ Personal feelings, especially love, get in the way of Jordan's duties as a leader: "he is terribly concerned about the fate of the individuals in the guerilla group and is incapable of thinking about them as instruments" (Slatoff 146). Here, as elsewhere, Jordan tries to balance conflicting emotions.

psychological price of killing one's enemies is an aspect of war that went largely unnoticed until a 1947 study revealed that during World War II, "only about fifteen per cent of American riflemen in combat had fired at the enemy" (Baum 45).²⁶ Hemingway was carefully attuned to this ethical question in 1940; he made sure to reemphasize it during the editing process.²⁷ In manuscript revisions, the philosophical discussion in chapter three between Robert and Anselmo was expanded from a half-page to eight pages, and in many other instances, Hemingway's amendments give "added emphasis to the horror of war" (Gould 241-43). Robert Jordan, paralleling Hemingway, develops more complex thoughts about killing over time. At the beginning, Robert claims that although he does not enjoy killing—only "those who are disturbed in the head" do—he "feel[s] nothing against it when it is necessary. When it is for the cause" (FWBT 39).

But after the long conversation with Anselmo, he muses more deeply:

Once you accept the idea of demolition as a problem it is only a problem. But there was plenty that was not so good that went with it although God knows you took it easily enough... You took to it a little too readily if you ask me, he told himself. And what you will be like or just exactly what you will be suited for when you leave the service of the Republic is, to me, he thought, extremely doubtful.

(FWBT 165)

²⁶ The results of this study, which was conducted by Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall, were taken very seriously by the U.S. Army. The institution of several training measures led to a firing rate of 55 per cent in Korea and 90 to 95 per cent in Vietnam (Grossman 35). Dan Baum points out that this enormous increase may be part of the reason for the high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder among Vietnam veterans (46); he does not consider how the changing nature of combat, and the public perceptions of those wars, may have also contributed to the disorder.

²⁷ Hemingway was not the first writer to consider the issue. Leo Tolstoy, for one, was also interested in the psychology of the individual killer:

War has always interested me; not war in the sense of maneuvers devised by great generals...but the reality of war, the actual killing. I was more interested to know in what way and under the influence of what feelings one soldier kills another than to know how the armies were arranged at Austerlitz and Borodino.

(qtd. in Grossman xi)

In this passage, Robert complicates his former views. After telling Anselmo that he does not enjoy killing, he admits to himself that “you took to it a little too readily if you ask me.” And after claiming that he felt “nothing” when it was necessary, he acknowledges in the last sentence that the violence will probably cause some long-term psychological damage. This pattern of thoughts is typical for a soldier, according to David Grossman: the kill is often followed by an initial stage of exhilaration, but “then when the remorse stage sets in they believe that there must be something ‘wrong’ or ‘sick’ about them to have enjoyed it so intensely” (243).

In Section II, we touched on the way linguistic manipulation can enable a soldier to kill. This device is part of the larger wartime project of dehumanizing the enemy by establishing him as fundamentally Other:

Killing is facilitated by the collective reconceptualization of the enemy group as less than fully human and the consequent determination that any individual member of that group of “inimical identities” is a suitable target of lethal violence.

(Dawes 138)

Hemingway skillfully balances the undeniable humanity of the enemy with the killer’s attempt to create an emotional distance. “Do not think of it as a man but as a target,” Robert advises Anselmo (FWBT 410), even as Hemingway undercuts this possibility, humanizing the sentries by giving them their own quiet scene. After Robert kills a fascist patrol, he begins to read the boy’s letters, but quickly stops when he realizes the psychological toll it is taking. He is too late, however: overcome with guilt, he ruminates at length on the issue. Robert’s conclusion is that it would dehumanize *him* to get accustomed to killing; it should always be difficult: “You have no right to shut your eyes to any of it nor any right to forget any of it nor to soften it nor to change it” (FWBT 304).

In a like manner, Robert Jordan catches himself looking through binoculars at the sentry he is about to kill. The act of lighting a cigarette emphasizes the sentry's humanity, so he puts the binoculars away to facilitate his unpleasant mission. "I won't look at him again," he tells himself (FWBT 433). The reader, on the other hand, has no choice but to look: Hemingway's development of the enemy characters collides with the protagonist's desire to relegate them to the status of Other. By revealing Lieutenant Berrendo in a variety of familiar wartime situations—grieving, praying, frustrated, disgusted—and then making him the final "target," Hemingway concludes on a poignant note.

To forestall the guilt of killing, Robert also imagines that he is not the agent who brings death. When he says, "the *máquina* has spoken" (FWBT 276), he anthropomorphizes the weapon and alleviates his own sense of responsibility. His sense of this technique becomes more explicit later in the novel, when his thoughts about killing have become more focused: "I think that killing a man with an automatic weapon makes it easier. I mean on the one doing it. It is different. After the first touch it is *it* that does it. Not you" (FWBT 438, emphasis mine). Anselmo also attempts to cope with his sins by transferring responsibility; before killing the sentry, he imbricates his commander in the dreadful task:

"I will do as thou orderest," Anselmo said.
 "Yes. I order it thus," Robert Jordan said.
 I'm glad I remembered to make it an order, he thought. That helps him
 out. That takes some of the curse off.
(FWBT 410)

Ironically, Robert Jordan uses the converse tactic in divorcing himself from responsibility. He knows that Pablo is going to kill the five volunteers, but even though Robert tacitly approves this plan by not objecting to it, he refuses to take any blame since

he is not the one pulling the trigger. It is “thy affair,” “thy problem,” “his, not mine” (FWBT 403-04). Robert’s repeated attempts to absolve himself suggest just how heavy the guilt of killing can be. Thus, from a number of perspectives, Hemingway directly tackles the issue of killing, and its competing political and ethical claims. The contradiction we must explore further is why Hemingway’s deepest examination of the horrors of war also constitutes his strongest literary statement in support of war.

VI. Complications

The foregoing analysis suggests that Hemingway’s thinking about war appears to change significantly in the fifteen years between *In Our Time* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. To be thorough, however, we must be careful to identify other factors influencing such apparent change. One is the development of the author’s style, which relied on the “iceberg theory”:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.

(DA 192)

In Our Time, with its lack of adjectives and its unemotional rendering of scenes of great brutality, is the most deeply submerged iceberg in the corpus. Setting and characterization are often omitted in favor of the most essential facts: a man dying, a man killing. The interchapters, shocking bursts of simple nouns and verbs, are radically experimental, almost poetic. Although *In Our Time* came early in his career, the book is perceived to be the epitome of the “Hemingway style.” Subsequent works were more

stylistically conventional: in fact, “nothing that came after *In Our Time*...would have the fractured, cubist quality of that book” (Stewart 109). *A Farewell to Arms* offers a fuller narrative with greater detail and characterization, as we would expect from a novel. But it also employs a good deal of the trademark Hemingway style: it “has its share of well-placed silences” (Wagner-Martin 112). Our examination of Frederic’s possible guilt unearthed some of those silences, which appear to spring as much from Frederic’s inability to grasp his experience as from Hemingway’s stylistic goals. Michael Reynolds’ statement that the novel is really ““five tightly interrelated short stories”” (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 113) underscores its emphasis on lacunae and inference. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* signals a more definite departure from the iceberg model. In 1940,

It remained clear that this was Hemingway writing. But the prose, still very distinguished, called much less attention to itself. It is less tense, less austere, less behavioristic and impersonal, is more relaxed and orthodox. The sentences are longer and more graceful in their rhythms...

(Young 205-06)

The Spanish novel’s relatively expansive style results in a book that is much longer even though it only covers four days. The thirty-page Pilar’s story, the eight-page conversation between Robert and Anselmo about the ethics of killing, and the long interior monologues of the protagonist are examples of the author’s commitment to reveal more of the iceberg than ever before. Thus, any conclusions that Hemingway reaches a fuller appreciation of the horrors of war over time are tempered by stylistic concerns. We wondered if the “priceless” “potting” of the enemy soldiers and if Frederic’s silence and drinking indicated unexpressed feelings of remorse; these suspicions seem well-founded when we take into account Hemingway’s waning belief in the power of omission.

Any valid comparison of these works must also consider differences of genre. *In Our Time* is a montage of images that lacks a true protagonist;²⁸ *A Farewell to Arms*, despite Reynolds' contention, is a novel that provides a sustained, if obfuscated, look at Frederic Henry; *For Whom the Bell Tolls* spends much of its 471 pages peering into Robert Jordan's mind. A priori, the deeper characterization of the novels should provide us with a fuller understanding of war, even discounting the increased maturity of the later characters. *A Farewell to Arms*, for example, shares many of the same themes as "A Natural History of the Dead," a coeval story, but it has the narrative space to develop them further. The story makes the points that death is not romantic, and that doctors can be torturers; its limited length prevents it from impacting the reader as Aymo's or Catherine's death does—recall the force of Frederic "saying good-by to a statue" (AFTA 332)—and prevents it from having the plot enrich the theme, as the threats from Italian allies underscore the healer-as-torturer dichotomy. Similarly, "The Denunciation," written in 1938, is closely linked to *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in its concern for the responsibility of killing.²⁹ But the story's Luis Delgado is not sketched as fully as Lieutenant Berrendo or the sentries, and Henry Emmunds's reflections cannot compare to Robert Jordan's. The story skillfully presents the waiter's ambivalence about causing another man's death and Mr. Emmunds's opaque acceptance of the responsibility, but in

²⁸ Many critics over the years have claimed that Nick Adams is the protagonist of *In Our Time*. D.H. Lawrence asserted that "these few sketches are enough to create the man and all his history: we need no more" (qtd. in Stewart 105). But the isolated, emotionally charged events we are shown leave too much unanswered about the character: "Hemingway was clearly less concerned with character development and plot than with portraying various states of feeling as embodied in Nick" (Tetlow 49). Moreover, in many of the interchapters that critics have assumed involve Nick, textual evidence is lacking. Nick is undoubtedly central to *In Our Time*, but he is not a protagonist to the degree of Frederic Henry or Robert Jordan.

²⁹ Critics have noted that the story involves "Hemingway's rather fitful efforts to work out his attitudes toward the Spanish Civil War that were partially resolved in the writing of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, begun in March of 1939" (Smith 370).

its limited space it must rely on the power of suggestion; the reader's imagination is called upon to replace the novel's disquisitions on the ethics of killing. Again, the limitations of the short story genre undercut the idea of a rigid chronological development in Hemingway's war fiction.

The final mitigating factor in comparing these texts is that warfare, along with its justifications, changed drastically between the nineteenth century and 1918, and again between 1918 and 1939. Hemingway's fiction is heavily laden with historical realities that influenced the perception of war. World War I violently introduced twentieth-century technology to what was still a nineteenth-century consciousness, shocking the public and shattering the prevailing meliorist myth:

Atrocities had occurred; their commission—by both sides—was inevitable in a war that was the first of man's machine wars...Events which produced unbelieving terror and enraged headlines during World War I would hardly produce surprise, much less passion, today. The involvement of civilian populations through long-range bombing, the strafing of cities, the use of mines and submarines, the frequency of "no quarter" engagements in which prisoners were killed as quickly as they were taken, the tremendous revolution in morality (or immorality) that occurred when great masses of men were concentrated in minute and devastated geographical areas—these factors constituted immediate horror for populations essentially unprepared for them in either military or moral codes.

(Cooperman 13)

Technology made warfare horrific, but it was actually a lack of technology that made the Great War seem particularly futile. Aircraft and tanks were only in their infancy, and without the mobility they provided, opposing armies shelled each other relentlessly in the trenches. Hundreds of thousands of men died to claim a few yards of terrain, and then hundreds of thousands more died in surrendering it back. Defensive supremacy meant

that this grisly war of attrition could not be won outright by either side.³⁰ Frederic Henry, realizing this, dismisses his formerly romantic notions: “perhaps wars weren’t won any more. Maybe they went on forever” (AFTA 118). The literary outpouring against World War I, and Hemingway’s own cynicism as expressed in *In Our Time* and *A Farewell to Arms*, is quite understandable when we consider the unprecedented nature of this war.

The Spanish Civil War in a sense combined qualities of World Wars I and II. The war shocked Spaniards because they had not yet become acclimated (if that is ever possible) to modern warfare:

The destructiveness of modern weapons had come as a surprise even to Spanish military men. In terms of artillery bombardment and slogging trench warfare Spain had not lived through anything resembling the United States Civil War or the First World War. The Spaniards’ image of war in 1936 was of short infantry encounters involving small units and only incidentally affecting civilian life—as in the Carlist and Moroccan wars. After Madrid and Guernica they knew the meaning of modern artillery barrages and air raids.

(Jackson 177-78)

So on the one hand the Spanish Civil War was that country’s World War I, an event that destroyed existing ideologies and ushered in the modern age; on the other hand, the Spanish war was a de facto proving ground for Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin. Although the war began for internal reasons, “the struggle between Nationalists and Republicans soon became caught up in the wider ideological and great power conflicts of the time” (Habeck 204). As such, it led directly into World War II; Spain was really Hitler’s first conquest, but it took the invasion of Poland to pressure the allies into forming a unified response.³¹ While World War II had a clear sense of purpose, of large areas of terrain

³⁰ The British attacks at Ypres are emblematic of this futility. The five-day attack in April 1917 gained 7000 yards, costing 160,000 men; three months later, the British gave back those meager gains at a cost of 370,000 dead and wounded (Fussell 14-16).

³¹ Robert Jordan also views the Spanish conflict in its global context:

won and lost by the *blitzkrieg* and the *Luftwaffe*, the Spanish War was an intentionally protracted affair. "Stalin and the Politburo decided that it would be more advantageous to have the war drag on as long as possible in order to keep Hitler tied up in a low-intensity conflict"; on the other side, Hitler "was not really interested in allowing Franco a quick victory" (Habeck 211). The Spanish war, then, had World War I attitudes, World War II technology and adversaries, and a sense of World War I futility and attrition. But as a civil war, it had its own brutality particular to the civilian-dominated armies and the close relationship between the combatants. Although we have previously discussed the way in which Otherness enables violence, an eerie sameness can also provoke atrocities: "deviant behavior by a member of our own group is perceived as more disturbing and produces stronger retaliation than that of others with whom we are less involved" (Shalit 48). A rich contradiction exists somewhere between Anselmo's conception of his enemies as brothers and Pilar's gruesome account of torture and executions.

The Spanish Civil war, due to a national sense of innocence and the influx of foreign powers bent on a displaced pan-European struggle, was horrific in its own unique way. Yet *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, despite its brilliant depiction of war's horror, is ultimately a celebration of duty; Robert Jordan's noble death contains almost none of the dark cynicism of the earlier works, in which soldiers uselessly "died like animals" (CSS 338).³² Much of this can be attributed to Hemingway's firm belief in the Spanish

But remember this that as long as we can hold them here we keep the fascists tied up. They can't attack any other country until they finish with us and they can never finish with us. If the French help at all, if only they leave the frontier open and if we get planes from America they can never finish with us.

(FWBT 432)

³² In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry finds that heroism is a myth:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted

Republican cause. This was the one issue in a largely nonpolitical career on which he took a firm stand, engaging in fund-raising, speech-making, letter writing, and direct contribution (Stoltzfus 183). Hemingway was not a communist, but he saw the looming fascist threat in stark terms: "The answer to the Nazi claim that Germans are a superior race and other races shall be slaves is to say, and mean it, 'We will take your race and wipe it out'" (*Men at War* xxiv). Perhaps the allies' repeated failures—to crush the Central Powers in World War I, to contain Germany after the Treaty of Versailles, to stand up for Spain when Axis powers practically converted it into a military outpost—had pushed him to finally accept the necessity of this war. "[T]here are worse things than war," he wrote in 1942, "and all of them come with defeat" (*Men at War* xxxi). Such a statement would have been unthinkable to the Hemingway of the 1920's, whose works in this decade suggest that "[t]here is nothing as bad as war" (AFTA 50). By 1940, Hemingway knew that war was even worse than he had thought—but so was defeat. We have acknowledged that this fuller depiction of war's horror, as we move from *In Our Time* to *A Farewell to Arms* to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is influenced by Hemingway's stylistic metamorphosis, the differences in genre, and the historical, philosophical, and political realities of these two wars, but it exists nonetheless. The richness of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* lies in the simultaneous development of two competing strains: a fuller depiction of the horrors of war and a burgeoning argument for its necessity.

words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it.

(184-85)

This cynicism melts somewhat by 1940, as Robert Jordan dies for a cause "on which the future of the human race can turn" (FWBT 43); the protagonist dies, but as Philip Young puts it, "this time the hero has won" (114).

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